

MEMORIAL

OF THE

CITIZENS OF PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

RESPECTING THE

CONSTRUCTION OF A DRY DOCK,

AT THE

NAVY YARD AT THAT PLACE.

FEBRUARY 13, 1827.

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MEMORANDUM

TO : THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

FROM : THE CHIEF OF THE ARMY STAFF

SUBJECT: THE ARMY STAFF

1. The Army Staff is the principal staff of the Army.

2. It is composed of the following members:

3. The Chief of the Army Staff is the head of the staff.

4. The members of the staff are:

5. The staff is responsible for the following duties:

6. The staff is organized as follows:

7. The staff is the principal staff of the Army.

MEMORIAL.

To the Honorable the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :

The Memorial of the undersigned, Citizens of Portsmouth, in New Hampshire,

RESPECTFULLY SHEWETH :

That, at every period of the history of this country, the harbor of Portsmouth has been considered of great importance for naval purposes. That, under the colonial system, and long before the Revolution, the British Government, aware of the advantages of this place, were induced to make it a resort for their vessels of war, and to establish a yard, where ships, of a large class, were built for the public service.

That, during the war of Independence, the Continental Congress, in like manner, duly appreciating its facilities for naval operations, ordered the construction, at this port, of a number of ships for the United States, one of which was the *America*, of seventy-four guns, the first ship of the line ever built in this country : and, through the whole of that struggle, it was the constant resort of armed vessels of different descriptions, both public and private ; and of French ships of war, including a division of the fleet, which had been defeated in the West Indies by Admiral Rodney. This squadron remained here many months, in perfect safety, and underwent a thorough repair.

That the Federal Government, also, whose early policy it was to lay the foundation of a respectable naval force, pursuing the course already pointed out, determined to make Portsmouth one of the positions, whence, in time of war, the means of protection to the citizens and commerce of the United States, and of annoyance to their enemies, should proceed ; and, in furtherance of that object, purchased an island in the harbor, and established a Navy Yard, where a considerable number of vessels of war, of all classes, have been built, in a style of naval architecture which, if equalled, is certainly not surpassed by those constructed at any other station.

Your memorialists, in addition to the series of facts herein briefly stated, would further respectfully represent, that the advantages of Portsmouth harbor, as a naval station, are numerous, and some of them, as they believe, peculiar.

This harbor is formed by a cluster of islands, on one of which the Navy Yard is situated, and through which the river Piscataqua, dividing Maine from New Hampshire, disembogues into the ocean. Several of these islands, on each side of the channel, afford effective

raking positions, where such fortifications might be erected, at a comparatively trifling expense, as would render it completely impregnable to the attacks of any naval force that could be brought against it.

There is no bar nor obstruction at the mouth of this harbor; on the contrary, at the lowest tides, there are ten fathoms, or sixty feet of water at the entrance, through the main channel to the Navy Yard, and at the Navy Yard wharf; where ships of the largest class may lay, and from whence they may proceed to sea at dead low water; a *desideratum* not to be found at any other naval station in the United States.

It is easy of access, with the wind at any point of the compass from South to West, or from South to East; and ships can beat in on a flood tide with the wind ahead, or they may, (the distance being small,) be towed in by steamboats, which, it is presumed, will, ere long, be an appendage to all the stations.

When in, ships are safe from all storms; the loss of a vessel here, by stress of weather, being a circumstance wholly unknown.

It is never, even in the most intense cold of winter, obstructed by ice: and the fact is remarkable that, for several weeks past, and at the present time, while all our other naval ports are closed with ice, this is as free and open as at midsummer.

It is difficult, if not impossible, from the peculiar nature of the contiguous coast, to blockade this harbor, as the experience of two wars has abundantly shown; and it is certain that, during the last war, no armed vessel, either public or private, was prevented, by the presence of a blockading force of the enemy, from proceeding to sea; which cannot be said of any other port.

Here, ship carpenters, in any number usually wanted, can be readily obtained upon an emergency, either for repairing or building; that description of artisans being more numerous in this, and in the neighboring States of Massachusetts and Maine, than any other class.

The deterioration in the hulls of ships, is far less here than at the stations further South. A difference of twenty-five per cent. in this respect, may be calculated on; an important and serious consideration, when vessels of war are, for a long time, laid up in ordinary.

With these facts and circumstances, strong as they are believed to be, and fully proved by history and experience, your memorialists had no doubt, that, whenever the attention of Government should be drawn to the construction of dry docks, this would be one of the points assigned for their location: and they have seen, with no small regret, that, in the late report from the Navy Department, no appropriation is recommended for that purpose.

As a measure of sound national policy, in reference to the Navy, they are of opinion, that a dry dock is an indispensably necessary appendage to every naval station, more especially, for obvious reasons, in time of war; with a view to which, all preparations of this sort are doubtless made; and it would seem strange that a station,

possessing so many and such prominent advantages, should be overlooked.

The considerable ebb and flow of the sea here, being twelve feet at spring tides ; the comparative cheapness of labor, and abundance of granite in the vicinity ; are circumstances that would render it, in the opinion of your memorialists, far less expensive to construct a dry dock here, than at any other place proposed.

Your memorialists, in expressing their most earnest wishes that an appropriation may be made, at the present session of Congress, of a sufficient sum to commence the construction of a dry dock at this station, are actuated by no motives of a local character ; they consider the object as highly important and desirable in a national point of view : and for the efficiency and future success of that Navy, so justly the pride and boast of the country.





